

Montana Wildlife Federation Testimony on HB 159

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee,

My name is Ben Lamb, and I am the Conservation Director for State and National Issues for the Montana Wildlife Federation. MWF is the Montana's oldest, and largest Hunting and Angling conservation organization, founded in 1936, and we currently have roughly 7500 members. We stand today in opposition to HB 159.

While well intentioned, HB 159 overshoots and misses the mark. The bill as written eliminates the voice of the hunter in developing regulations related to wildlife management. While this bill is clearly aimed at restricting the authority of FWP to eliminate lead from bullets or shot, as it is written it does far more than that.

Simply put, moving forward with this bill whittles away at the democratic process hunters and anglers engage in to help define seasons, weapons restrictions in populated areas and directly reduces the involvement of hunters in the decision making processes that Montanan's have come to expect when dealing with their wildlife.

There is an historical precedent set over 100 years ago when the hunters, landowners and conservationists (who were often times, all three wrapped in to one person) stood up, and with the help of the Legislature, provided a means by which professionals could manage wildlife populations based on the best available science, social conditions and the will of the people by allowing significant public input in to the decision making processes. That system has worked well since its inception and it can lead us in to this new century. We must maintain the hunter's voice when it comes to wildlife management. This bill, again, eliminates that voice.

Right now, the science of lead contamination of bullets in big game, or in lead shot for upland is being fleshed out. Until then, we're putting the cart before the horse to outlaw something that very well may not be needed. Unfortunately, this bill eliminates the conversation, reduces the role that the public has in proper wildlife management, and does little to nothing to protect hunter's rights or conserve our wildlife. That's the real problem with HB 159. It simply silences the public in what should be a very public debate.

Respectfully submitted,

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